

Why Our System of Domestic Servants is All Wrong

**Madame de St. Point,
Distinguished Social
Philosopher and Poetess,
Argues That Our Servants
Are Still Essentially Slaves
and That We Must Replace
Them by Business Employes**

By Mme. Valentine de St. Point

The Brilliant Parisian Poetess and Grandniece of the Great Lamartine.

IN all nations of the white race, whether in Europe or America, there is a crisis known as the "servant question," a crisis which is exceedingly distressing and continually grows worse instead of better.

Every domestic seems to detest his or her master more and more and all the employers exhibit a growing distrust of their servants. The two classes are now irreconcilable enemies whom social habits have forced to live together. Each side accuses the other of being the sole cause of the trouble. Both are equally wrong. Like all other social troubles, this one cannot be imputed to any particular class. The evil is general and the cause of the evil is general also. It arises from the very nature of modern life.

The negative virtues of devotion and resignation which made a good servant in other days exist no longer. In life as the serving classes accepted it formerly there was no place for the slightest desire of liberty or for the many wants which are now increasing from day to day. Such humility cannot exist in modern life. Formerly a home and food guaranteed by the masters answered all the material requirements of servants. Very small wages meant luxury, a little store of money to be set aside for the future. Today the most untrained maid is ambitious to dress herself exactly like her mistress. Her needs, her tastes and her desires are the same; the degree of refinement alone varies. Small wages are entirely inadequate to satisfy any of the girl's ambitions.

From these conditions there has arisen in Europe a system of larceny among our servants disguised under various pretty names. The nominal wages are nothing compared to the commissions collected on all kinds of purchases, which vary from small sums up to very large ones in the homes of the rich. The servants have little concern about their duties to their employers; they are only concerned to retain the largest possible share of the money which passes through their hands.

The Modern Servant a Rebel in the House.

The masters who feel that their property is being devoured in spite of all the efforts they make to prevent it can have no confidence in these hostile creatures, who are yet familiar with their most private affairs, who are slanderers by habit and who feel obliged to drag their employers morally in the mud, in order to prove that they, the servants, are ill-treated. The servant is set apart a stranger in the house where he lives. How then can we expect that he should regard otherwise than as an enemy the employer who spoils his life?

Among the servants of former days the humiliating side of the calling was forgotten in the sense of duty and devotion which made them take the part of their masters in everything for the sake of the good name of the family. It seemed to them that a little of this good name belonged to them, and this moral ideal raised them above the purely material state of domestic service.

Today these old feelings no longer exist. The servant shares the material life of his master but has no sense of moral unity with him.

The trouble arises because we have retained ancient habits and customs, and have not changed them to suit the changed ideas of the present day. The political and legal rights which have been conferred by the system of equality have been put into force. The corresponding duties are less attractive. They have not yet been fully defined. Servants are no longer servants, but yet they are not anything else. For the moment they are only parasites, lodged with a master who has become for them an enemy to be envied and despised.

The excessive individualism which prevails prevents them from being interested in the affairs of their masters but leads them to pursue their own interests without remembering that most often it would be more profitable to make one agree with the other.

Aristocracy established long ago a system of slavery which was in harmony with its ideal. Democracy has not yet solved the problem of replacing that system. Present-day domestic service is only a transient and defective state of slavery, bearing the most sumptuous name. True servants always have been slaves. The "good servants" whose services we enjoyed up to the beginning of the nineteenth century were the direct

descendants of the ancient slaves and differed from them in no essential respect. Our "bad servants" of to-day are still slaves in outward form, but revolting more or less successfully against their condition.

In the luxurious life of Oriental, Greek or Roman antiquity slaves abounded. They formed the majority of the inhabitants of a State which was ruled by a very restricted elite. For these privileged persons all sordid and material cares were unknown. Every necessary service of the household or the care of their persons was faithfully performed by the slaves. At every step of the master a slave attended, trained to yield absolute obedience. At meal times innumerable



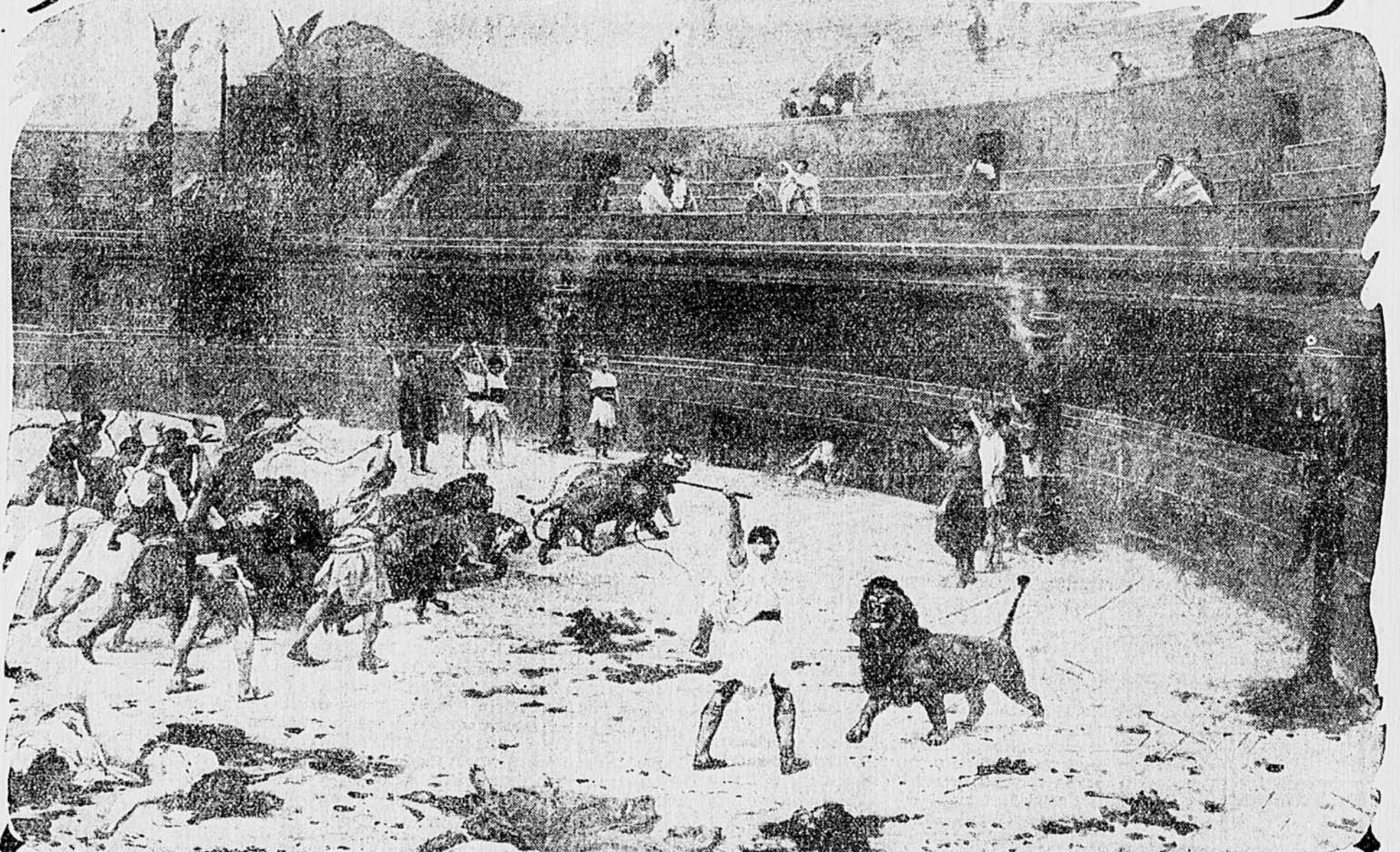
A French Print of the Eighteenth Century Showing a French Lady of Title Being Assisted Out of Bed in the Morning by Her Maid.

dishes, moved among the guests, satisfying or anticipating every desire.

As the slaves had been thoroughly adapted to their existence they did not suffer from it. They were ignorant of any other ideal and they were happy. Their ambition did not go beyond a possible enfranchisement which might make them small tradesmen and which would change their condition very little. They worked with good will for the benefit of the master, because they knew that they profited by it. When the master grew rich their labor decreased, because the number of slaves was proportionately increased.

A certain hierarchy of duties was established among them in which various abilities might achieve a certain degree of comfort and leisure. In this aristocratic social life material wants were much more restricted than with us, both for the masters and the slaves. The masters did not trouble their minds with material requirements, which they left entirely to their slaves. All their preoccupations were of an intellectual, sensual or aesthetic nature. They lived in and for beauty, demigods for whom their slaves multiplied time and created perpetual leisure.

From this point of view, slavery was an element of civilization of the first importance. If the Mediterranean civilization, which we have inherited and without which our world would be very different from what it is to-day, had not accepted slavery it would not have developed so magnificently as it did. In an age when speed did not exist, when

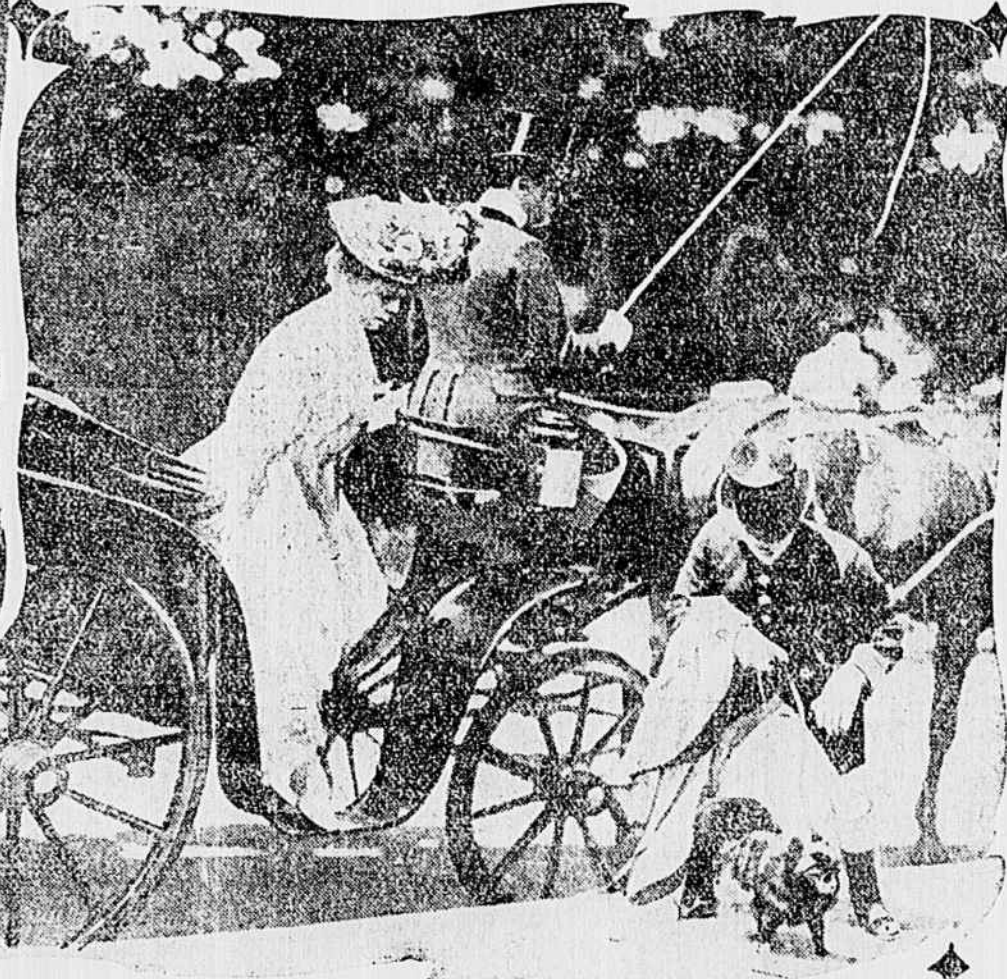


"Roman Slaves Driving the Beasts Back to Their Dens After the Spectacle."

Painting by J. L. Gerome.

Slaves were the first domestic servants. In the early ages it was the custom of the conquering armies to bring back the men, women and children of the defeated foe and hold them in servile bondage. Nothing was too menial, nothing too abhorrent or dangerous for the slave. Thus the slave performed every requirement of household, domestic and personal service, and was sent into the bloody arena to amuse the master.

Mme. de Saint Point contends that this old theory of slavery has come on down through the ages and prevails to-day in the relations of mistress and servant in our modern twentieth century civilization. This picture below illustrates the prevailing idea now that nothing is too servile for a household servant to be made to perform. The average red-blooded American youth, if given his choice between facing the lions in the arena and attending to the toilet of a pet dog, would probably choose to be found in the picture above on this page rather than in the photograph printed below.



Mrs. Ogden Mills Leaving Her Carriage at the Newport Casino with Footman Caring for Her Pet Dog.

steam, electricity and perfected machinery had not come to multiply the handiwork of man, those who were thinkers, inventors, artists, discoverers and creators would not have been able to work so effectively as they did if their time had been taken up by the material cares from which the slaves saved them. The progress of civilization would, at least, have been infinitely slower.

Without slavery the great public works, highways, bridges, aqueducts, churches and temples, which were the necessary elements of ancient civilization, could not have been executed.

Thus, what is considered a monstrosity by our modern minds, impressed with equality and liberty, was, in another age, a thing harmonious, useful, capable of freeing human thought, and for these reasons perfectly moral, when the conditions of the time are taken into consideration.

So complete was the submission of the slave that he expected to be beaten or killed when he displeased his master, and he even gave his life for the amusement of his lord. The gladiators who killed one another for the amusement of Roman society were a class of servants.

Even in those days there were occasional yearnings for freedom in the

breast of some exceptional slaves. Spartacus, a gladiator of the Roman arenas, led a wonderful revolt of the slaves or servants that defied the Roman authorities for years. He was a great pioneer of equality, but he was far ahead of his time.

The idea of personal faithfulness to death was always part of the ideal of domestic service. In the days of our grandfathers a good servant was ready to be beaten and killed in defense of his master's interests.

Constant attention to the bodily needs of the master is an essential characteristic of slavery as of true domestic service. We see the slaves scraping and massaging the bodies of their lords and ladies in the Roman baths. The intimate cares, which were required of a servant in our luxurious eighteenth century life in France, were not less a form of slavery than the Roman kind, and the one who yields such service must always be a slave.

As long as an aristocratic ideal ruled the relations of men, as long as a clearly defined hierarchy kept every man in the class that his father belonged to; in fact, as long as one was born a noble or a bourgeois, an artisan or a slave, domestic service, taking the form of a comparative slavery, was possible, and con-

tributed to the development of civilization.

But as this ancient aristocratic ideal has changed since the French Revolution, obliterating progressively differences in social condition and destroying caste, and ending in the modern democratic idea of equality, domestic service has become repugnant. Domestic service implies a veritable bodily service, which is the negation of all equality of rights and of personality.

The abolition of slavery was a logical act and an inevitable affirmation of the democratic ideal, but to be consistent with itself and in harmony with all its principles democratic society ought to suppress domestic service.

We shall reach this point before long from force of necessity, with or without a change in the laws. It is better to face this question at once and find a rational solution for it rather than to flounder about in our present miseries. It is better that every person should educate himself and be able to do without the ridiculous domestic service of to-day, which is a parody of slavery and results only in degrading morally the master and servant.

While the servant trouble is very vexatious among the old nations of Europe, where a certain class still de-

votes itself nominally to domestic service, the trouble in America is much greater.

It is natural that the rebels who created the great Republic should not have founded a class of servants.

The emigrants driven later from European countries by poverty and attracted by the higher wages of America are not disposed toward the narrow life of the servant. They are also entirely ignorant of their calling. They submit to it only as a temporary means of existence, while they are looking for a better opportunity to make a new career. Such persons can never make good servants. They are lacking in the essential quality of the servant—sub mission.

As to professional servants from Europe, there are too few of them for the growing needs which the immense American prosperity is creating daily. Thus it happens that among American servants: ill-feeling toward their employers has been raised to the dignity of a principle. They bring to it a harsh ill will supported by a labor organization which insures them against all risks. They are the true masters of the household. There is no end to their exactions, and will be none until you suppress them altogether.

America owes it to herself to suppress domestic service and show a method of realizing this capital social reform to the old traditional nations of Europe. This act would be a worthy completion of the struggle which America began in the last generation for the abolition of slavery.

No country is better prepared to find the means of accomplishing this reform. The importance of club life in America, the great development of life outside the home, suggest the methods that may be followed. Americans must step forward boldly and go resolutely to the end. The practical sense and the thorough understanding of comfort, which characterize Americans, are guarantees that they will succeed in this experiment.

The True Solution of the Servant Problem.

You must suppress domestic service for these reasons: 1. Because the servant has become unattached, and is a strange and hostile element in a united household which he or she disorganizes. 2. Because the state of domestic service or modified slavery, not honestly accepted with all its consequences, is degrading, like every hypocrisy. 3. Because the habit of always yielding to the caprices of servants, in order to avoid disorganizing the household every day, is cowardly and degrading. 4. Because domestic service which attaches one person to another and keeps him constantly at his orders is humiliating to a being who wishes to be free.

To do away with servants who belong to the different ideals and the luxurious domestic life of other days we must:

1. Limit as far as possible the requirements of strictly personal service, without, of course, abandoning those which are essential to the refinement of life.
2. Perform oneself such domestic work as does not occupy too much time and leave the rest to non-domestic specialists.
3. Organize life in common on a cooperative basis so as to replace by machinery much that has been done at home by hand.
4. For all work that cannot be done by machinery, replace the present servants by business employes. Every apartment house or dwelling house should have a series of specialists who look after the needs of all the occupants.

As long as domestic service is not suppressed slavery will not have been abolished. It is to America to give slavery the finishing blow.